



**Charlotte Blake Alston**  
**Master Storyteller/Narrator**  
**Teacher/Study Guide**

*Suggested activities in preparation for and as follow-up to the storyteller's visit*

## **Before the Performance**

### **Familiarize your children with African and African American Folktales by:**

- Reading aloud or having your children read several folktales (consult your school librarian for help in determining which books or stories would work well for your grade level).
- Choose an Anansi story, a tall tale, a dilemma tale (the resolution of conflict is left to the listeners to discuss), a story that offers an explanation for a natural phenomenon (a *porquoi* or why tale) such as *Why Mosquitoes Buzz In People's Ears*. Do any of the stories have morals or lessons? What are they?
- Try to find versions of the same story. Have children make comparisons between the two.
- Encourage students to tell – not read – a story they are already familiar with. Discuss the differences between telling a story and reading that same story from a book.
- Have your students brainstorm what they think a storyteller might do to make a story interesting to an audience. Make a list on chart paper. Encourage them to watch and listen carefully during the performance to observe the storyteller's voice, facial expressions and body movements. Are there instruments used? How are they used in telling the story?

*\*Important Note: Always refer to the African continent as just that – a continent. It is as diverse, if not more so, than the European continent. There are over 50 separate countries and hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, cultural traditions and belief systems within each country's borders. Just as we make a point to clearly identify Poles, Czechs, Armenians, Scots, Celts, Welsh, Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, or the Hmong. We must also make a point to do the same when referring to the inhabitants of the vast and ethnically diverse continent of Africa.*

### **Familiarize your students with the names, locations and diverse cultures of the African continent by:**

- Identifying the ethnic group, culture or country associated with the stories you use. Write and speak the name of the group or region of origin when referring to the story. (For example, Anansi stories were created by the Ashanti people of what is now Ghana in the western part of the continent. Sungura, the trickster rabbit comes from Kenya on the opposite side of the continent. The land areas, peoples and lifestyles are different.)
- Identifying on a map or globe – not just the African continent – but the country (and ethnic group or culture where possible) of the story's origin: The Ashanti of Ghana, the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Baganda of Uganda, the Shona of Zimbabwe.
- Selecting an ethnic group, country or region of the continent. Research and explore the cultural traditions, foods, clothing, family structures and languages of that region.
- Search an encyclopedia - type on or click-on an African country and download or print out the information. What do you discover that you didn't know?

## **During the Performance**

- Listen and observe the storyteller carefully. Participate when asked.
- Notice how the storyteller uses her voice and take notice of any additional items that the teller uses to enhance the story.
- Visualize the setting and characters of the story.
- Be aware of what in the stories makes you laugh, feel empathy, excitement, sorrow, fear or suspense. Did any of the situations in the story sound familiar to you? What were they?
- If the story has animal characters, pay attention to their behavior in the story. Do they take on human characteristics?
- Notice if a character – human or animal – learns a lesson in the story, is there an aspect of the story that the listener can learn from?

## **After the Performance**

- Review the list that was brainstormed prior to the performance. Ask your students to identify items on the list that the storyteller incorporated into her storytelling style. Ask them to recall anything the storyteller did that was not included on the list.
- What specific things held their attention most?
- Did any of the stories leave them with something to think about or discuss? What, if any lessons were learned from the stories? Which stories? What were the lessons?
- If there were instruments, how were they used to enhance the story?
- Which of the stories did you enjoy the most? Retell the story in your own way.
- Illustrate one of the stories.
- Research and select your own story for telling.
- Create your own story, one that teaches a lesson perhaps.

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